



# Best Practices 2000

## Focus on Building Fair Housing Coalitions

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

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The mission of the Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity (FHEO) is to enforce the Fair Housing Act and other civil rights laws to ensure equal housing opportunity, and free and fair housing choice without discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability or familial status.

We carry out our mission in a number of ways and through a variety of mechanisms. One of our most widely known activities is receiving, investigating and conciliating housing discrimination complaints. When conciliation is not possible and there is a reasonable cause to believe discrimination has occurred, we issue a determination of cause and transfer the case to the Office of General Counsel for prosecution. We also review recipients of Federal

funds to ensure their compliance with fair housing laws. If violations are found, we negotiate Voluntary Compliance Agreements to correct the problems. Additionally, we provide technical assistance and guidance on complying with the fair housing laws, as well as education and outreach on rights and responsibilities under the fair housing laws.

To help accomplish our mission, we fund state and local agencies located in jurisdictions with laws that are substantially equivalent to the Fair Housing Act, through the Fair Housing Assistance Program (FHAP), for receiving, investi-

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gating and resolving discrimination complaints. We also fund

fair housing organizations and other non-profit organizations to investigate complaints and provide education and outreach through the Fair Housing Initiatives Program (FHIP). FHEO is promoting partnerships between FHAP agencies and FHIP organizations to develop strategies and actions for removing barriers to fair housing choices and opportunities.

We look forward to working with FHAP agencies and FHIP organizations as we identify and develop best practices. Replicating these best practices will enable us all to carry out our missions more successfully.

### Guiding Principles for Forming Fair Housing Partnerships

There are two overriding reasons to form fair housing partnerships. First, the commitment to a common goal, and second, the need to stretch scarce resources. Fair Housing organizations have a **shared vision** and common goal — reducing and eventually eliminating housing discrimination. Partnering with other community organizations that share the goal of achieving fair housing enhances effectiveness. In addition, **resource shar-**

### A Model for Ending Discrimination in Communities



(Left to right), Tracey Gill, Balt. Neighborhoods, Inc.), Tyrone Davis and Barbara Snow (Balt. City Housing Authority, and Steven Van Dyke (FHEO Office of Policy) listen to focus group discussion.

**ing** can leverage the limited budgets of organizations, resulting in more productive outcomes.

### Factors for Building Successful Fair Housing Partnerships

**Factor #1: Identify key stakeholders:** Within every community several organizations, agencies and individuals have an interest in eliminating discrimination. Examples include:

- **Fair Housing Organizations:** Fair housing organizations, including human relations commissions and voluntary nonprofit organizations focusing on fair housing problems.
- **Other Government Agencies:** Federal (such as the Justice Department,

over

Department of Agriculture, Health and Human Services, and Bank Regulators), State (Welfare-to-work) and local government agencies and/or authorities in the metropolitan area or region.

- **Advocacy Groups:** Advocacy groups and organizations that foster the needs and concerns --including housing needs -- of particular segments of the population, such as people with disabilities; families with children; immigrants and homeless persons; as well as specific racial or ethnic groups.

- **Housing Providers:** Landlords and/or owners.

- **Banks and Other Financial Institutions:** Banks and other financial institutions, such as insurance companies, provide loans and financial support to improve

homes or areas of the community where living conditions have deteriorated.

- **Educational Institutions:** Educational institutions, including administrators, teachers/professors and other representatives can assist by conducting studies and developing educational activities for delivery in a formal or informal setting.

- **Other Organizations:** Neighborhood organizations such as Community Housing Resource Boards; United Way Agencies; Community Resource Councils; or, Citizens Committees on Race Relations provide information, ideas, and/or support.

- **General Public:** The general public can be a critical element in successful program implementation. These may include:

- Credit counseling and consumer organizations,
- Private for-profit groups,
- Media and entertainment,
- Faith-based groups,
- Philanthropic organizations,
- Firms and private employers such as technology firms.

- **Builders and their professional organizations:** Builders and developers play a key role in fair housing and should

be contacted in order to assure voluntary compliance.

**Factor # 2: Develop Your Organization's Purpose:** Develop an overarching vision outlining desired outcomes you intend to pursue. Develop a mission statement describing the strategy for achieving the organization's vision. This will help clarify roles in future partnerships. The board of directors should develop the mission statement, which may include merging its vision and purpose.



Focus Group participants getting acquainted.

Once these are identified, discussions regarding mutual benefits and outcomes can be conducted and the benefits of partnering explored. Strive to develop common goals that are workable, yet not overwhelming. Potential groups with common goals and/or interests include:

- **Adjacent states, regions and communities outreach:** Conduct outreach to attract organization such as real estate professionals and community housing boards in adjacent counties.

- **Transportation agencies or companies:** Transportation goals should be in concert with housing goals in order to provide a reliable means for people to get to and from their jobs.

**Factor # 4: Non-Traditional Partners:** Identify organizations that have common interests in outcomes resulting in equal housing choices. Private industry organizations may realize more business and profits as a result of fair

housing partnerships. In addition, enforcement agreements may result in partnerships. Lawsuits won by fair housing groups can have a positive impact on the behavior of organizations and individuals. Examples of non-traditional partners include:

- There are some fair housing organizations that have established effective partnerships with transportation organizations, since transportation significantly affects where an individual lives and/or works.
- Fair housing organizations that have established partnerships with performing arts organizations to present cultural awareness performances that emphasize the benefits of diversity. Discussions are conducted after the performance to encourage dialogue about fair housing and/or housing discrimination issues.
- Hospitals and correctional institutions that develop housing.
- Labor unions that are interested in providing housing for their membership.
- Boy and Girl Scouts leaders have been effective as testers.
- Contractors, developers, and em-



Lauretta Dixon, Director of FHIP/FHAP, presents the model for ending discrimination in communities.

ployers provide economic development opportunities for low and very low income persons under the Section 3 regulation.

- Goodwill Industries.

**Factor #5: Establish the Partnership:** Clearly define the roles and re-

sponsibilities of each partner. If feasible, codify the relationships through written agreements, such as a memorandum of understanding. Develop partnership goals and objectives, a realistic timeline, and procedures and policies to facilitate the partnership's success. Agreements should be broadly written and for the long term. More than one document may be needed for a particular partnership.



Mary Davis of the Cuyahoga County Department of Development, Cleveland, OH, listens to focus group discussions.

#### **Factor #6: Identify Resources:**

Clearly define the resources (financial, human or institutional) each partner brings to the table. Describe in the written agreement how the resources will be shared and/or leveraged.

- Private fair housing groups need direct funding. These groups provide training to the local population and build relationships within the community.
- Federal funding in many cases represents the lifeblood of fair housing organizations. In addition, the ability of these organizations to assemble a seamless flow of funding is equally critical. Consequently, it is extremely helpful for Federal agencies to provide details of funding availability and other resources on the web to improve access to such vital data.
- Other critical resources to fair housing organizations include volunteers, retirees, student internships (particularly law students and students meeting community service requirements), Americorps, and networking with other "boards".
- Additional resources to consider include:

- In kind donations,
- Free space donated by religious groups,
- Private sector senior executive loan or exchange programs,
- Government agency personnel sharing,
- Foundation grants,
- Pro-bono legal services,
- HUD staff,
- Owners and managers of large housing properties
- Real estate companies,
- Libraries,
- Internet,
- Fair housing broadcasts using public access cable television channels,
- Advertisements on supermarket bulletin boards,
- Advisors/consultants,
- Public service announcements to air on television and radio.

**Factor #7: Evaluation:** Continually assess the organization's progress in achieving its stated goals and objectives, and evaluate areas for improvement to ensure the partners are obtaining the desired results of the partnership. The following guidance will assist in determining the partnership's effectiveness:

- Establish and evaluate performance against performance measures.
- Determine resources needed to strengthen the partnership's ability to meet its goals.
- Review and analyze other effective partnership models to save time and avoid reinventing the wheel.
- Fair housing organizations need guidance in developing effective evaluation criteria.
- Put requirements for evaluation in initial agreement. Note: There may be disagreement especially if a partner is also funding the agency.
- Determine how to measure enforcement.

**Factor #8: Effective Communication:** Effective communication is essential to maintaining harmony among partnering organizations, and it is necessary to maintain strategic alliances with other industry peers and partners.

## **Partnership Benefits**

Forming partnerships between organizations or between public and private entities has several benefits. Most agencies will have the same goals, missions and objectives, so partnerships are logical. The partnership may also be established for programmatic and efficiency reasons. The following represents such examples:

- **Reduce duplication of effort:** Some fair housing organizations and agencies perform similar activities, which may result in a duplication of effort if they form a partnership. For example, a variety of groups provide public awareness information of fair housing laws. Pooling resources and working together diminishes duplication of effort and saves financial resources that can be re-channeled to other efforts.
- **Work in the Community:** Effective partnerships can have a strong voice in the community. Partnering can influence state and local decisions regarding housing.
- **Looking to help the same people:** Federal Fair Housing Act enforcement fights discrimination in housing in all of the following classes: color, religion,



Nancy Downing (left) of the Connecticut Fair Housing Center, Hartford, CT, and Tracy Gill of Baltimore Neighborhoods, Inc. share ideas.

handicap, familial status, race, sex, and national origin. Agencies will, at a minimum, provide protection for these classes.



- **Use respective strengths to help each other:** Fair housing organizations that rely heavily on government funding sometimes experience gaps in grant allocations and have extremely scarce funds to maintain operations. Partners can assist during these periods by providing subcontracts to keep them operating.
- **Ensure consistency of effort:** It is important for both the public and private entities to perform their tasks in ways that accurately reflect the fair housing laws in their communities. Open communication and awareness of each partner's duties and responsibilities ensures each is following the laws.



Ivy Davis (center), Director of Programs (FHEO) talks with focus group participants Jan Alderton Pallesen (left) of the Civil Rights Commission, Cedar Rapids, IA, and Louise Wozniak Lorenz.

- **Coordinating with other governmental agencies:** Oftentimes, enforcing the provisions of the Federal Fair Housing Act and substantially equivalent fair housing laws of states and local governments requires crossing governmental (state/local/Federal) lines. It can require public and/or private agencies to work with the Federal government to complete a specific task. Partnerships can be effective when organizations, agencies and private entity goals and objectives are pooled to achieve desired outcomes. The major goal of fair housing agencies is to combat housing discrimination through education and enforcement activities.

### Building Fair Housing Coalitions--Best Practice Focus Group Results

Fair housing professionals from across the country gathered at HUD Headquarters on February 24<sup>th</sup> to help build a model for the eradication of housing discrimination in communities. This model – chosen for its critical importance to FHEO's mission – focused on the elements needed to develop and foster strategic partnerships in local housing communities across the nation.

Besides HUD staff and Best Practices team members, focus group participants included previous HUD Best Practices winners Tracy Gill, Baltimore Neighborhoods, Inc, MD; Barbara Snow and Tyrone Davis of the Baltimore Public Housing Authority, MD; Louise Wozniak Lorenz, Cedar Rapids Civil Rights Commission, IA; Jan Alderton Pallesen, Cedar Rapids Civil Rights Commission, IA; Nancy Downing, Connecticut Fair Housing Center, CT; Mary Davis, Cuyahoga County Department of Development, OH; and Lee Porter, Fair Housing Council, NJ.

Karen Jackson, Associate General Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administration, opened the meeting. Lauretta Dixon, Director of FHIP/FHAP, led the discussion focusing on a written model for developing partnerships. Focus group members shared their collective talents and knowledge to refine the model.

Overall, focus group participants said that the model captured the ingredients needed to build a partnership and provided a good source of information for new fair housing agencies or advocates not familiar with the process of building partnerships. They did say, however, that the model would be most effective if it were integrated with concrete examples of real partnerships.

From the discussions, it was clear that one of the keys for enabling effective partnerships is enhancing the abil-

ity to identify potential partners, including both traditional and non-traditional stakeholders in the community. The most significant challenge to overcome is the lack of resources, particularly money. The need for finding ways to leverage partnerships in order to maximize the utility of available resources, as well as finding new sources, was the focus of extended discussion. There was consensus that developing clear and accurate success measures is necessary to optimally apply those resources and articulate positive results.

### We Want to Hear From You

Please review the fair housing building coalitions model and tell us what you think. As an overall system, what are the strengths in the system? What are the weaknesses? In order to better achieve the goal of ending discrimination, in what areas would you and/or your colleagues like to receive technical assistance? How can HUD improve upon the success factors within the model or the overall success of building fair housing coalitions?

Send your comments and suggestions to Neil Brown, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 409 Third Street S.W., Suite 310, Washington, DC 20024.

### Best Practices Nominations

Submitting a Best Practice has never been easier. Now HUD staff, partners and other outside organizations can submit Best Practice nominations using HUD's internet site. The 2000 Best Practice nominations process opened March 20<sup>th</sup> and runs through May 31<sup>st</sup>. You may access the automated nomination system and obtain other best practices information through our web site at [www.hud.gov/bestpractices/](http://www.hud.gov/bestpractices/). We look forward to your nominations.